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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9439
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2480
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0171
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4217
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1324
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2091
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7149
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8352
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1035
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 3212
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 6165
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2442
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0796
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2393
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PRESS COVERAGE OF BAN ON LARGE GATHERINGS MISSES
THE POINT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

[¶1](#). (C) On May 30, the Islamabad district administration issued an official Section 144 order banning "all kinds of gatherings of five or more people" inside Islamabad for two months. Breathless press reports described the order as a new and dangerous decision, but in reality the document merely renewed an order that had been in effect in Islamabad for over two months. (Note: The existence of such an order has not curtailed public protests in Islamabad during this period. Anti-government protests in front of the Supreme Court, some attracting up to 10,000 persons, have been a regular feature of Islamabad life since the Chief Justice controversy began on March 8. End Note.)

[¶2](#). (C) On May 31, Islamabad Chief Commissioner Khalid Pervez told PolOff that Section 144 bans were a "routine affair" and were regularly renewed. He stressed that the local magistrate had the authority to and frequently did issue such bans. However, Pervez stressed that groups could apply for exemption permits that allowed specific gatherings, including protest marches. He indicated such exemptions were routinely approved.

[¶3](#). (C) Senior Superintendent of Police (Security) told press that enforcing the Section 144 ban allowed police to close streets around the protests and to monitor "suspected elements" at check points. Check points have become particularly crucial as the frequency of suicide bombings increased, noted the Superintendent.

[¶4](#). (C) Comment: Government of Pakistan officials seemed surprised when international media coverage of the section 144 renewal exploded on May 31. We continue to remind officials that the world is watching Pakistan's human rights performance and that it should be sensitive to even the insinuation of potential crackdowns. Of course, it appears that in this case, the insinuation was much worse than the reality. End Comment.

